

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2013

**PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY**

RE: Proposed H.B. 5274, H.B. 5438

My name is Derek Czenczelewski and I am a City Councilman for the city of Bristol. The issue of unfunded mandates and their impact on Connecticut's municipalities is one that has existed for years despite repeated requests by the municipalities to the State to reduce, fund, eliminate or suspend these unfunded mandates.

As you well know, unfunded mandates imposed by the State on Cities and Towns have proven to be not only challenging but exceedingly burdensome for the municipalities you all represent. According to a report published by the Connecticut Council of Municipalities, the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant is currently underfunded by over \$700 million. All of our budgets are being pushed to their breaking points. Household, local municipal and State government expenses are increasing daily. The message we keep hearing from the public is loud and clear--taxpayers want relief and they want it fast! As individuals, who like you, have dedicated ourselves to representing the interests of the people we serve, we implore you to steadfastly focus your efforts on providing relief for our taxpayers and municipal budgets by funding, suspending or outright eliminating these mandates.

A great place to start that would have an immediate impact, is to eliminate the Board of Education's Minimum Expenditure Requirement. This requirement not only handcuffs local governments from adjusting their education budgets as needed, but it also eliminates the ability to hold Boards of Education fiscally accountable. With guaranteed funds, where is the incentive to manage budgets wisely? Unfunded mandates have effectively taken away the power of our Board of Finance and City Council to manage our own affairs as we see fit and as the taxpayers elected us to do.

Many of these mandates are founded on good principles and intentions. But without the accompanying funds to support them, they are unreasonable. On the local level, we have had to be very cognizant of prioritizing what we spend money on. We are consistently separating the "wants from the needs" and forced to make difficult decisions on what to cut and what to fund. Unfunded mandates just add to the challenges and short change the taxpayer. Moreover, having officials from the Capitol mandating items to be funded by local governments is patently unfair,

needs to stop and in fact, shows a disregard and a lack of faith that local governments will make the right decisions for their constituents.

In reality, it is the taxpayers that are carrying this burden regardless of where the taxes are being levied. If the State can't or won't fund these mandates, then they should be eliminated or in the very least, suspended. Once again, this is a very urgent issue that we are asking you to address. Without legislative help taxpayers all over Connecticut will continue to be forced to pay the burden passed along from the State and, in all candor, this is simply not fair to them. On behalf of my colleagues and the entire city of Bristol, we urge you to do the right thing and either fund, suspend or eliminate these undue burdens.

Sincerely,
Derek Czenczelewski
Bristol City Council